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Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: September 19, 1969

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Place: Senator Symington's
Office

SUBJECT: Senator Symington's Views on Sub-
Committee Hearings on U.S. Overseas
Commitments

PARTICIPANTS:

Senator Stewart Symington
Ambassador Robert McClintock

I called this afternoon on Senator Symington to say that I had been asked to coordinate the preparations in the Department of State for testimony before the Sub-Committee on U.S. overseas commitments, at least so far as the initial hearings on the Philippines and Laos were concerned. Messrs. Pincus and Paul of the Senator's staff were present at our meeting.

I told the Senator that I was making a courtesy call and I had no intent of going into the details of the Pincus-Paul questionnaire. Furthermore, although I could speak for the Department of State in assuring the Senator of our desire to cooperate wholeheartedly in his investigation, I had no authority to speak for other interested agencies, such as the Department of Defense, NSA, CIA and the White House, whose involvement with the hearings was in the charge of Mr. Ken Belieu. However, speaking for the Department, I could say that I saw no difficulty in approaching the Subcommittee with the utmost candor, and that I was confident that the Senator would agree that we could readily concert on that information which could be made public without injury to US interests, and that information which should be held privileged.

The Senator concurred and said in fact that one of his main objectives was to be helpful to his old friend, Secretary of State Rogers. Events of the past had not been the work of this Administration. He said he had no desire whatever to embarrass the conduct of our foreign relations. However, the groundswell of public opinion manifested in his daily mail indicated a mounting concern by the public as to US involvement

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abroad; and he said, so far as military operations were concerned in such places as Thailand and Laos, that the Congress had a constitutional obligation rising from its responsibility for the raising of armed forces to know what was going on there.

He said specifically with reference to Laos that, while it might be useful not to publicize the activities of CIA in counter-insurgency warfare, at the same time there must be some boundary to the limit beyond which the American public had the right to know what their forces were up to. By way of example, the Senator said that it should not be too much of a secret as to the number of US bombing sorties over Laos, since surely the communist enemy knew when they had been bombed. He also asked me if I knew if there had been American forces involved in the recent (and untypical) victories of "Laotian forces" over the communists in the Plaine des Jarres. I said that I had no information on this point, and stressed once more that I had not come to give substantive answers to the Pincus-Paul questionnaire but had come to say that I had been charged with coordinating our measures to provide these answers. ←

The Senator said that all witnesses would be placed under oath. He said, "This is a protection for the witnesses -- particularly the military".

Senator Symington referred to his own personal involvement in the MacArthur hearings, which he dated in 1951. He spoke highly of the skillful censorship exercised by Admiral Davis, which pleased both the Department of Defense and the Congressional committees involved. However, for his own hearings, Senator Symington proposed what he called a "referee" who would be empowered, both for his committee and by the departmental Secretaries, to decide just what information should be kept privileged and what could be made public. I asked if he had anyone in mind for such a job. The Senator said no one but asked that I make a specific request to Secretary Rogers that such a referee be appointed.

My overall impression was that the Senator was very pleased with the mark of attention showed him by my visit. I think that he will be inclined to be reasonable in determining what information

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should be kept privileged. In fact, he hinted that the "referee" to decide on information should be nominated by the Secretary of State. His outline of operation, so he said, is to have executive sessions first and then, after it has been determined what information can be made public, to hold open hearings.

The last two paragraphs of this memorandum have been submitted to the Acting Secretary.

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